

STORY OF ATARI™ MISSILE COMMAND™

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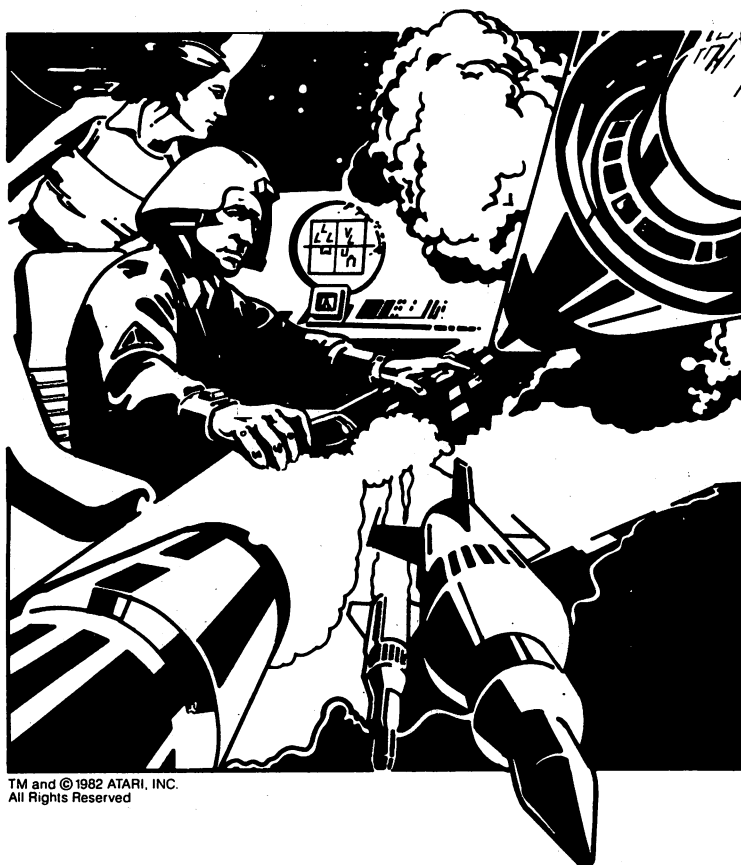
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Story of MISSILE COMMAND

This is your ATARI MISSILE COMMAND Read-Along Book. Every time you hear this sound . . . , it means it's time to turn the page. Now we are ready to begin. Open your book and we will start our story and remember, when you hear the sound, turn the page.



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It fell to me to make the final report. I was there. I was involved from the outset. And I survived to tell the tale. I'm 1st Officer Ed Mathews. But let me start at the beginning.



Outside the main conference room of the Zardonian Central Committee, a buzzer had gone off, a red light flashed to green, and the conference room door hissed open. I entered. I had been chosen as part of a new defense concept—a small, three-man, antiballistic missile base. The base commander hadn't been selected yet, and the picking of a 2nd Officer was left to me. The base was top secret and its existence was known only to the ministers of the central committee. I was handed sealed orders and told not to open them until departure zone zebra of the Zardonian Desert. The base commander would join us on site. I saluted and left. The door hissed shut after me.



2nd Officer Sarah Cochrane was a round peg in a square system. She had a brain and the guts to use it. It took three days above surface in an ASUS-141 to reach Base Alpha, deep in the desert. It was small but lethal. It had as much throw weight as any of the bigger bases. The command launch cell was buried in a granite ridge and surrounded by a boron alloy cocoon. Only a direct hit could take it out. Sarah and I took our stations and fired up the system for a static test.



Cochrane: "Rabbit in the hole."

Mathews: "Override, locking collar, venting, verify."

Cochrane: "All A-OK. Tube hot. Firing, now."

The cell shook as the engine strained to breakout power level.

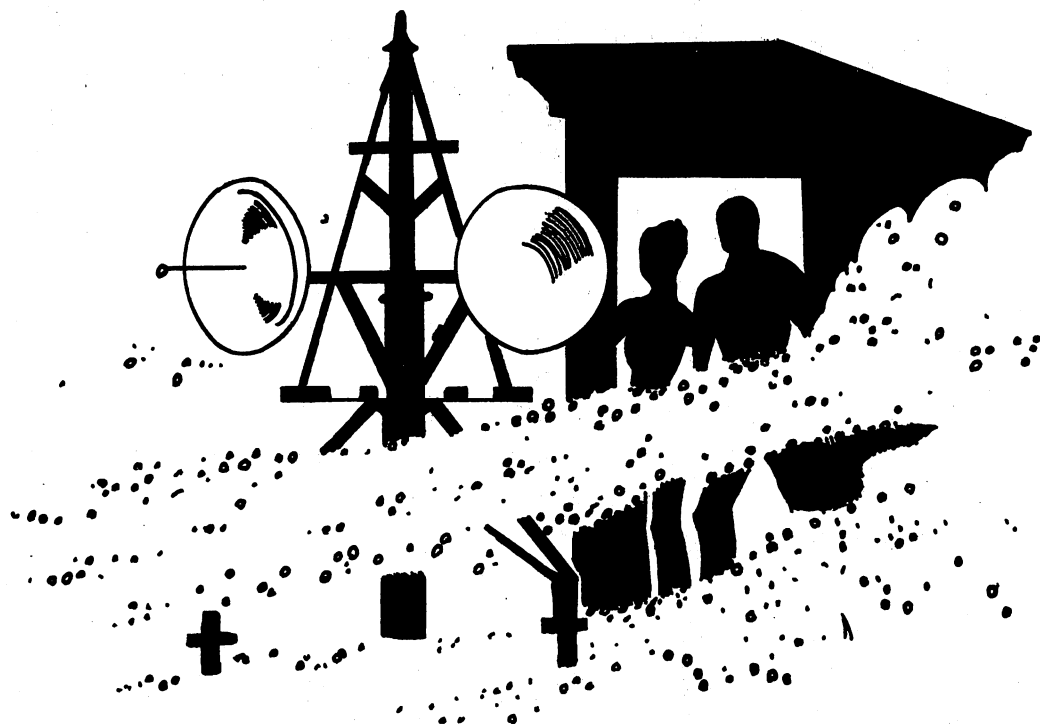
Mathews: "Critical pullback at this time."

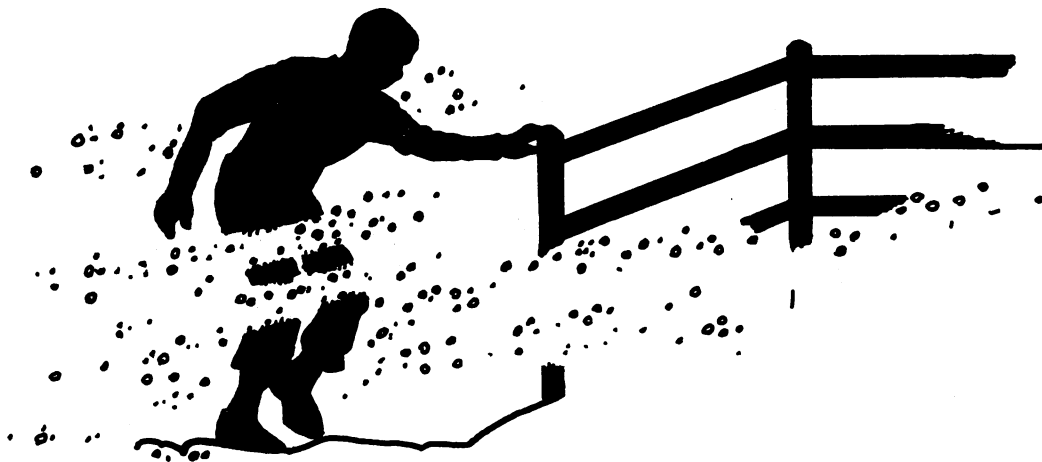
Cochrane: "Roger, we have shutdown."

Mathews: "Refuel bird, reset status."

Cochrane: "Roger."

By the end of the week, we had the bugs out of Base Alpha. We would take some sting out of the next Krytolian attack. And we were untargeted by them, since the base hadn't been on line, yet. We were in the community cell. Sarah was arguing with me about the way I was aligning the AT-4 transmitter. Everything with her was a debate. I wanted to check up on the base commander, who was overdue, and something was blocking the band. So we went up to the surface deck to check the antenna. A blinding, yellow dust storm was raging across the desert, creating an ion block. Those desert storms could go on for weeks.





Two days later, the outer perimeter pressure alarm was activated. We both grabbed Z-beam stun guns and raced for the surface deck. Day was practically night, outside. The storm was so thick you could barely make out the grid on the ramp up to the entrance of the deck. Then I saw an OLV-104 approach the end of the ramp and stop. A figure clambered down and staggered toward the entrance. The door slid to one side with a hiss. The storm raged in with the man, obscuring him, and filling our eyes with dust. The door hissed shut. The man was Commander Kramer. He had been unable to get in by ASUS-141, so he'd come overland. He had no orders with him. They would have contained his authorization ID. He said he'd been told they were to be sent on here. No courier had come. There was the storm, but I felt uneasy. It wasn't neat.

I was spooked about Kramer. He did everything right, but I just wasn't sure without orders. I knew a courier couldn't have gotten through. And the radio being down didn't help matters. Then when I'm starting to feel okay about it all, he did something that set me right back on edge. We were all at our stations in the CLC. The system was fired up so Kramer could look it over. Then right after standdown, he casually told me to change the targeting alignments for the second wave Krytolian launch, as he left the CLC. Change alignments! Sarah had already gone up above, and I was alone and coming out of my skin! The warning klaxon went off. An explosion on the outer perimeter!

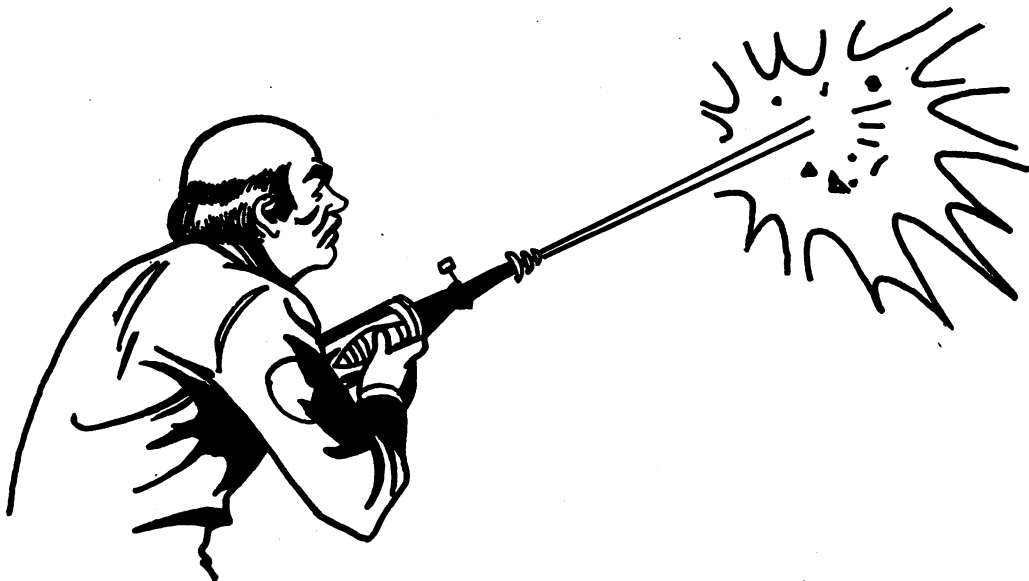


It was night outside. The storm made it look like a brick wall. Kramer ordered us into E-suits and DP aspirators, and told us to make a perimeter search. I didn't like leaving him inside alone, but I had to wait until I could discuss things with Sarah. We grabbed our Z-beams and the door hissed open. The storm rushed in to meet us. Outside, the force of the wind drove the sand particles so hard they tore at our suits. From inside, Kramer operated the penetration floods, for all the use they were. Then we saw a halo of red flame through the dust. The ASUS-141 was badly damaged, and the pilot was unconscious, but unhurt. I figured he was the courier. We got clear just as the vehicle went up for good. Inside, as we put him on a bunk, I noticed his rank insignia for the first time. He was a commander. Now we had two!





As soon as we were out in the connecting tube, alone, I told Sarah everything I knew. We decided to confront Kramer. He was down in the CLC, and acted very friendly when we entered. He asked about the patient, and seemed genuinely surprised at our suspicions and intention of relieving him of command. He was just as confused by a second commander. Then he asked a question I couldn't answer, "Did the new commander have orders?" At that point, the patient appeared, strangely no worse for the wear. Commander Stark, the orders said, answering two questions. Stark instructed me to realign the targeting angles, over Kramer's protests. Before anyone could stop him, Kramer grabbed a disintegration gun from the wall rack. I moved to grab one too, and Kramer zapped the rest of the guns.



Kramer insisted Stark was an imposter. His orders were fake. Central Zardonian Intelligence knew cover had been broken on this project, but they didn't know how or where. Kramer said the first Krytolian wave was going to be nothing more than diversionary radar images to trick us into early launch, giving their real launch a clearer shot at the cities. Stark said Kramer was nuts and ordered us to rush him. Sarah and I hesitated, not sure.



Then Stark jumped, grabbing Sarah around the neck with his arm. I moved toward him and he squeezed. He again ordered me to realign the targeting angles. I moved to the console. Kramer protested, but he didn't fire. I knew the real commander at that moment. On one side was human compassion, and on the other, cold, bloodless purpose. For one was a man, and the other a Krytolian android.

I knew what to do, now. I punched in a wave frequency that split the air; certain death for an android. It set up vibrations in his chip memories, shattering them. The android's arm dropped from Sarah's throat as his brain failed and he collapsed.



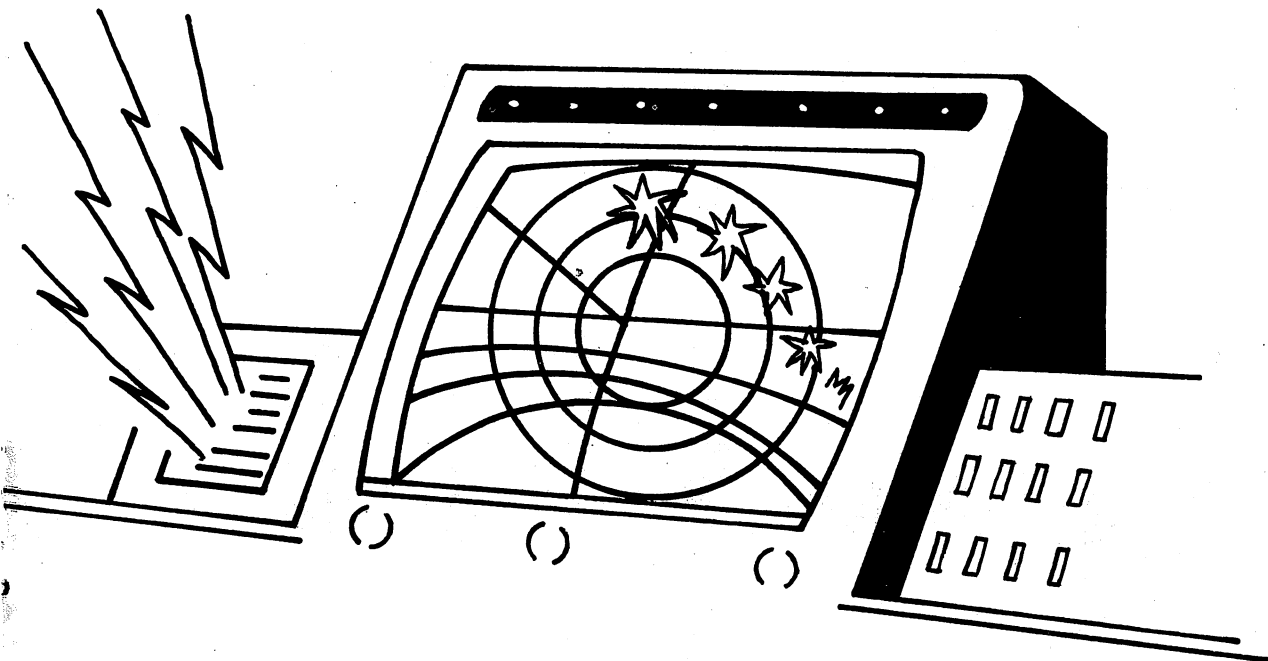
The warning alarm went off, indicating a Krytolian launch had been picked up on the radar scanner. Kramer ordered us to stations. Base Alpha was on line and operational. The radar and computer tracking locked on the Krytolian simulators. Their lights cast an eerie glow in the darkened CLC.

Cochrane: "Rabbits in their holes."

Kramer: "Bring the birds on line."

Mathews: "Maintain and hold at yellow."

Cohrane: "Roger. Birds on line and holding yellow."



It was difficult not to believe our screens and readouts and wait. Then the images just faded and the real signals appeared.

Kramer: "Bring all birds to condition red."

Cochrane: "All birds red at this time."

My hands sweat on the controls, as I waited for the Krytolian IBMs to arc overhead.

Kramer: "Ready launch all birds."

Mathews: "They're hot!"

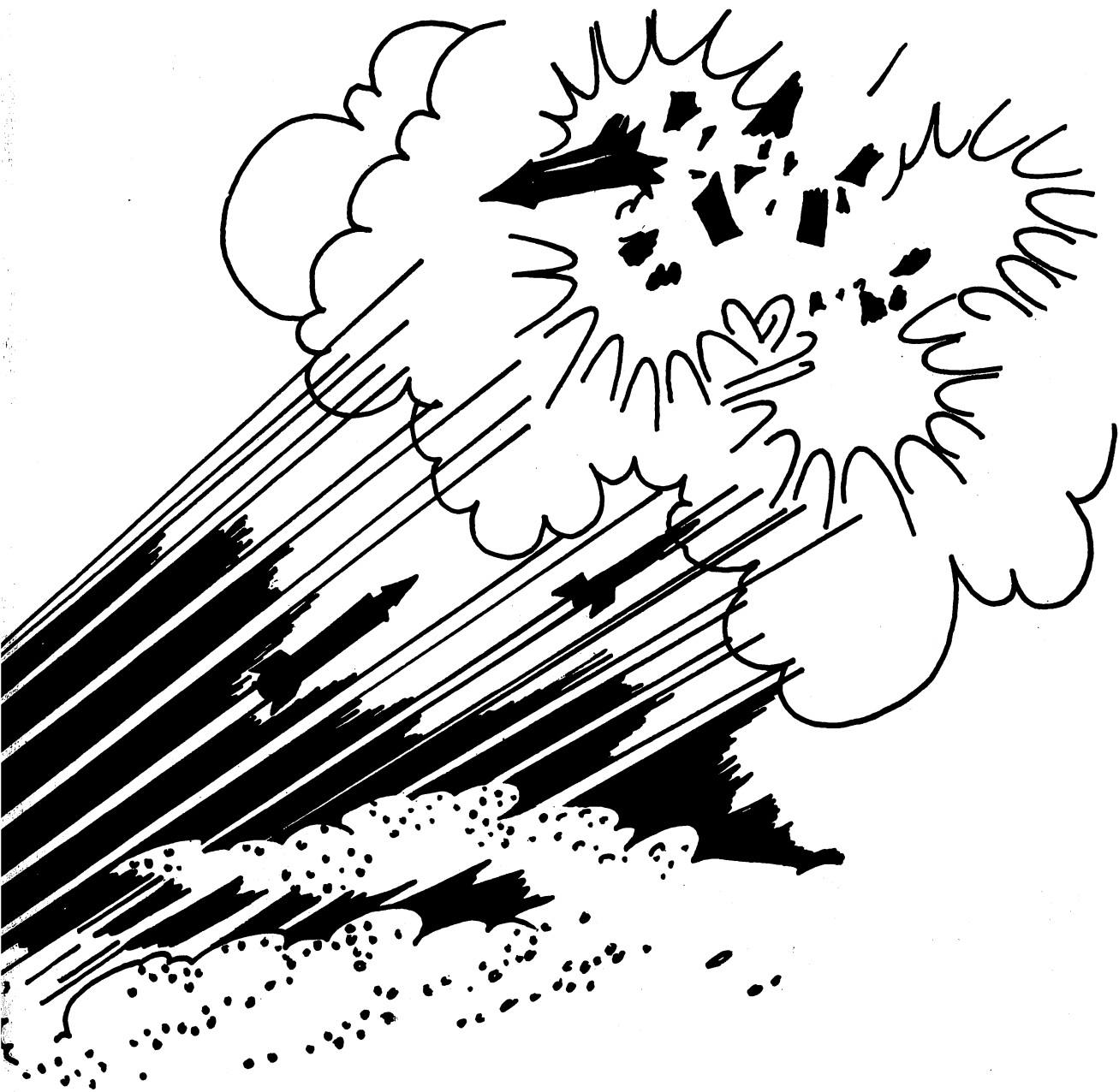
Kramer: "Fire!"

The surge of the ABMs shook the CLC.

Mathews: "They're gone!"

Our capacity of ten ABMs rose up and cut through the Krytolian missile wave, making the job for the ABM sites down the line a little easier. We were going to standdown and reload, when the warning alarm went off. A Krytolian, smart cruise missile was on the screen, locked on us!





Mathews: "I thought we were untargeted!"

Kramer: "So did I!"

Then we both realized the same thing at the same instant. The android, itself, was a homing beacon, functioning or not. Only Kramer got unbuckled. That's what saved Sarah and me when the cruise missile hit the site. I don't remember anything after that. When I came to, I was lying on the ground a few hundred yards from the complex, still strapped in my seat. A medivac ASUS-100 found us the next day and brought us here to the hospital. The CZI agent closed his notebook and the debriefing was over. He asked me what I thought it all added up to. I answered simply, Krytolian Intelligence Service has penetrated the inner circle of the Zardonian Central Committee.



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